

After all, we begin with the assumption that all of us share at least some of the same values. These shared values become a foundation for consensus. And it is only after we have built this consensus that we can actually start getting things done.

That is the process, but what about the policy itself? Implementing policy to help the weak or “least among us” begins with defining those in need, oppressed or struggling. And more often than not, important endeavors seem more mundane than noble. But small steps properly taken for noble purposes ultimately strengthen the weak among us.

For instance, test scores identify an achievement gap among the races in educational attainment. The same is true for high school graduation rates. These are facts that people can appreciate, understand and want to change.

In North Carolina we began a pre-K program for at-risk 4-year-olds and reduced the class size in kindergarten through third grade. The combination of these two programs is a proven formula for reducing that achievement gap.

We are also addressing the dropout rate by restructuring high schools across the state. We are even merging many high schools with college so students take college courses in high school and actually graduate with a college associates degree.

These are small endeavors taken for noble purposes.

Failing to take steps like these to address this flaw in education, resulting in poorer achievement by one segment of the population, essentially condones a system of discrimination. Therefore, the broader goal of providing for the least is being met by ostensibly small steps that will lead to major change.

These are difficult programs to get passed in the legislature. The argument against them is that they are too costly and too aggressive.

My argument for them is twofold. First, we are helping our people reach their full potential and be the person God made them to be. And second, better educating our people improves our workforce and builds a better and stronger America.

In short, it is the right and just thing to do. Also, in America it is patriotic to help the weak, to stand up for people most in need. We all have a public duty to act. Strengthening the individual strengthens the country.

Make no mistake, patriotism is a value too. And it is a useful ally when trying to change a historical mindset. Implementing goals require some persuasion and some prefer the appeal to patriotic duty over that of moral responsibility.

If patriotism and morality are not reason enough, our economic prosperity certainly should be.

When I became Governor, one of my biggest challenges was how best to position North Carolina and its people, especially our young people, for success in the 21st century economy. Now, few places symbolize the transition of our nation’s provincial past into a major player in the global economy better than North Carolina.